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An Affectionate Salutation. 1826

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AN

AFFECTIONATE SALUTATION,

&c.

1826

DIRECTIONS TO THE BINDER.

When this sheet is done up with "*Hints on Gospel Ministry,*"
Ac. it should follow PAGE 72, Sig. F.

AN

Affectionate Salutation

TO THE

MINISTERS AND ELDERS

OF THE

SOCIETY OF FRIENDS.

—
BY THE AUTHOR OF
CHRISTIAN DISCIPLINE, &c. BRIEFLY CONSIDERED.

—
YORK:

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ADVERTISEMENT.

The following remarks, though the result of many years observation and solid consideration, are submitted to those whom they may concern, with feelings, not of doubt, but yet of diffidence, knowing how liable all of us are to err. The author, therefore, does not wish them to have any influence beyond that which may arise from the pure, unbiased, unflattering witness for Truth, affixing a seal to his observations.

When attached to his former "HINTS ON GOSPEL MINISTRY," &c. they may be considered as a supplement to them.

AN

AFFECTIONATE SALUTATION,

&c.

“ Every good gift, and every perfect gift, is *from above*, and cometh down from the Father of Lights.” *Jam. i. 17.*

MY DEAR FRIENDS!

Often has my mind been introduced into serious consideration on the subject of this observation, in reference to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, as described by another apostle, *Rom. xii. 6-8.* and *Cor. xii. 4-6.* both in relation to the direct terms of the important passage which precedes this address, and also to the inverse of the proposition it contains, which may be stated thus: “ Every gift that cometh down *from above*, and is from the FATHER of LIGHTS, is *good and perfect.*”

It may be conceived that these positions apply with peculiar emphasis to the gifts of Gospel Ministry ; but perhaps a due consideration of their import may show, that they bear with much greater weight on other gifts in the church, than may, in many cases, have been supposed ; and hence that they deeply concern us who are delegated to the important station of elders—a class on whom it more immediately devolves to judge of the nature of gifts and offerings ;—a charge which may not only apply to judging of the offerings of others, but which deeply involves the exercise of our own respective gifts.

It is not in a feeling of any thing approaching to censure, on any class, that a feeble individual is engaged thus to salute you ; but under an humbling sense of the need in which he stands of improving by the hints, which, in tender gospel solicitude, he now submits to your consideration.

Permit me then, my beloved Friends, to remind you, that to be “ *PERFECT*,” it will be obvious that “ *every gift*,” of whatever nature, must be *pure* ; and that to be pure, it must be *unmixed and without alloy*. Convinced as

you may be of these truths, perhaps some sources, which, if not carefully obstructed, must inevitably supply more or less of the unsanctified influence of creaturely will or affections, may not have been so fully contemplated by us all, in this important view, as their nature and tendency demand.

If "every gift which is from above is *perfect*," does it not follow that every perfect gift, as it is preserved in purity, must bear the heavenly impression of "Holiness to the Lord." In other words, what do we apprehend constitutes the different degrees of clearness and decision, concerning the exercise of our respective gifts, whatever they may be, but the presence or absence of any *mixture* of the will, wisdom, or affections of the creature? For though these gifts, like the stars in the firmament of heaven, may be of different degrees of magnitude, yet, like them, those of the first magnitude may be obscured; while, on the other hand, if nothing intercepts their light, the smallest shine with *unclouded* rays; so that spiritual beholders may as clearly discern them, whether larger or smaller, to be heavenly gifts, as the outward eye can perceive those luminaries, according to their

respective degrees of magnitude, to be stars in the expanse of heaven.

The carnal will and affections of man stand opposed to the operations of Grace, until reduced and brought under subjection to this heavenly influence; and we learn from the experience of many, if not of all, who have recorded the dealings of the Lord with them, before they have been employed by Him to speak in his Name, that these holy requireings have been presented to their view, (so it was even with Moses and other prophets of sacred writ,) very deeply in the cross to their natural wills and inclinations. Hence an apprehension may have obtained with some, not only that such requisitions must originate in something superior to the will of the creature, but that, on all occasions, they must ever be in the *cross* to that will; yet in order to perceive how far this idea is just and applicable, let us examine the grounds of the opposition which the creature feels, against this inward and spiritual work of the Great Creator.

Those who duly consider their own frame, and the constitution of man, will not find it difficult to conceive, that this opposition rests

on very different grounds, with individuals actuated by widely different natural dispositions; though, in every case, resolvable into this one general cause—the opposition of the creature to the will of the Creator. Several tributary sources may combine in the same individual to form one united stream of opposition; but it is not needful for the present purpose to specify many of them. Let us select one for example—a disposition prone to self will, and that feels resolutely opposed to bending and yielding to the simplicity of manifested duty. Let us suppose this to be the predominant source of opposition to the acceptance of the proffered gift. Are we to conclude that this opposition, though in a reduced measure, must and should on all occasions present itself, that the individual may at all times exercise the gift under the cross? Can we, on mature reflection, imagine that such an opposition has any tendency to render the offerings more pure, than they would be under a feeling of perfect acquiescence, and resignation to become *any* thing or NOTHING in the Divine Hand?

Again, let us suppose that pride, that predominant passion in the human breast, either

from our unwillingness to become fools for Christ's sake, or in some of its manifest deceitful workings in the heart, may erect the strong barrier by which nature resists the proffered gift, or the progress of complete self-reduction, in the exercise of it; after being rightly prepared and having yielded to open the mouth in the Name of the Lord. Is it desirable that feelings of this kind should ever remain? Or is it not rather desirable that they should be even so far subjected to Divine influence, and we become devoid of all creaturely activity, that it should be as the meat and drink of any to do our Heavenly Father's will, even in that exercise of the pure and perfect gift, which may have been commenced very deeply in the cross to the natural desires and inclinations?

Perhaps enough may have been said to show, not only that a state should be sought after, wherein the cross of our own wills is no requisite attendant on sacrifices offered in the Name of the Lord; but that, in the most perfect reduction of all opposing feelings, the "*perfect gift*" may be exercised in the most perfect state of purity, and of freedom from

mixture of the creature, so far as relates to its *direct opposition* to the will of the Creator.

There is however another, and at least an equally important point of view, in which it may be profitable for us all, to consider the necessity of preserving unalloyed, the purity of the "*perfect gift* ;" knowing that without a scrupulous attention to this point also, none of us can truly "possess the vessel in *sanctification* and honour."

The *activity* of the *creature* is at least as fruitful a source of *admixture* with the heavenly gift, as opposition to the Divine will. Perhaps it is even a much more dangerous enemy to perfect purity, in the exercise of the gift bestowed ; because it is more subtile in its operations, and therefore more liable to deceive ; unless a very strict vigilance be maintained against its influence and incitements. This danger is very far from being confined to any distinct class of individuals. Those who have felt, or who still feel, an opposition in their minds to yielding themselves to become as mouths for the Lord, are by no means exempt from it. It is a danger attendant on all,

and requiring the vigilance of all, to be preserved from sliding into it.

It is very possible to feel inclined to speak, in creaturely activity, and yet mistakingly to imagine that something of constraining Divine Influence is at work ; but a moderate exercise of vigilance and care may detect such a presentation as this. The activity of the creature, which requires a much greater portion of vigilance, is that which would speak unprepared, when under the *feeling of Divine virtue*—that would obey the presentation of duty without attaining to that full and entire *subjugation of self*, in which there is a willingness, not only to become *any* thing, but to become NOTHING. The latter, sometimes, is not perhaps the most easy attainment ; for, after experiencing deep inward exercise and conflict, and being brought thereby to a willingness to become *any* thing, there is something in nature which at times stands not a little opposed to the idea of having endured such exercise, and after all, if the expression may be used, of its ending in nothing, and as if all was in vain and to no purpose.

But ah ! let none be at all discouraged at this representation ; for such dispensations

will be very far from being in vain to *thyself*, whoever thou art, if thereby thou art brought to taste and perceive the value of that blessed experience of an eminent apostle—"I die daily." Neither let any flinch at the avowal of the firm belief of a poor fellow traveller, that without this attainment also, the "PERFECT GIFT" cannot be exercised in *perfect purity*.

Hast thou never attained to this, even thou who mayst be young in the Lord's work? Hast thou not, at times, felt all within thee so brought into subjection, that thou couldst truly say respecting these requirings: "Thy will, O Lord! not mine, be done?" so that in such seasons, wherein thy submission has been complete, thou hast had no will, either to speak or to be silent; but simply to know and do the will of thy Lord. This is not only a safe state, but it must be obvious that this is the *ONLY* state in which any can exercise the perfect gift, without any *admixture* of the *creature*.

Can any therefore, even the most experienced, expect their gifts to appear in *unclouded brightness*, but as they continually

arrive at this precious attainment, in *every offering*. But how encouraging to all is it to believe, as vigilance and care are maintained to view impartially, and with a single eye, all presentations to speak in the name of the Lord, that all may attain to *faithful* and *well-timed obedience*, which will redound to their own solid peace and growth in the Truth; and will ensure the feeling evidence of unity from those who are alike careful how they judge.

“Though such an entire submission is at times attained,” may many be ready to say, “yet my own will revives and resists—or the activity of the creature again and again presents its offerings.”—Well, be encouraged, I affectionately beseech you, of every class, to persevere in this safe path; and the issue will be your exceeding great reward. Hence let none be dismayed or discouraged; but humbly incited to seek after the joy that is set before them. Dost thou think, whoever thou art, that the apostle who has been mentioned, did not experience the same necessity of being renewedly humbled, and reduced to simple unmixed obedience, when he said: “*I die daily*?” Though the will—the wisdom

—the activity of the creature, when cut down, as by the sword of the Spirit, again and again revive; yet as a tree which is *often* cut down, shoots out its branches with less and less vigour, until it ceases to put forth; so the strength of the creaturely will and affections becomes enfeebled, the more completely our experience, like that of this apostle, may be: “*I die daily.*”

Hitherto the subject has been considered in relation to the secret operations of the mind and will; but there is another, and a conspicuous source, from whence the “perfect gift” is very liable to derive some *admixture of imperfection*. The utterance or manner of delivery, may operate either as a clean or an impure medium for conveying the heavenly mission. Is it not, therefore, of deep importance, that no eclipse of its lustre—no derogation from its purity—should be occasioned by want of due care in this respect?

If “every gift that is from above, and cometh down from the Father of Lights, is good and perfect,” is it not obvious that it must be the same in all its tendencies and all its *unresisted* operations; permit, therefore,

in affectionate tenderness, the enquiry : What is the cause, in giving utterance to Divine requisitions, of the various imperfections of mode and manner, which have been so observable in many individuals of our society ?

Let us enter upon this point under feelings of delicacy and great tenderness ; and in a disposition of kindness and allowance towards those who may be sensible, that their own mode or manner is involved in the consideration ;—but, at the same time, let us be impressed with a deep feeling of the importance of searching even *these* defects to their proper source. The case demands plainness and perspicuity ; and may be best treated with brevity ; permit me therefore to ask : Can we on serious reflection suppose, that *unresisted* operations of the Divine gift, are calculated to produce any changes from a *natural* utterance, especially such changes as can lay no claim to being adapted to the solemnity and importance of speaking under a Divine influence. If these are not *requisitions* of the Spirit of Truth, what can they be but *defects*, and such as call for a remedy, particularly when they have any tendency to turn the attention of the auditors to the

manner, rather than to fix upon their minds the matter of what is delivered.

Let us, however, consider if another class of society is not as much involved in a due *performance of duty* respecting points of this nature, as those individuals who believe themselves called upon, in any station, to speak in the name of the Lord. We are creatures of habit, and prone to imitate example. Habits also are sometimes acquired, almost insensibly except to *observers*; though they are sometimes with great difficulty laid aside. Hence it is highly incumbent on those in an especial manner, who are delegated watchmen and watch-women on our walls, to be *tenderly*, yet *very carefully* vigilant over the delivery of all, who think themselves called upon to speak in the exercise of any spiritual gifts.

Perhaps attention to the wholesome injunction, "Lay hands suddenly on no man," may have sometimes operated to prevent as early an extension of care on these points as would have been both profitable and kind. If, however, attentions of this nature have been delayed, under an idea that they involved

a necessity either of approving or discountenancing the offerings themselves, it has surely been a very mistaken apprehension. Whilst carefully avoiding, if the case require it, any such sentiment, may not very early *tender* admonition or intimation, suitably put an individual on avoiding a manner that may not only retard a clear judgment as to the offerings; but even, so long as it continues, may mar if not obscure a gift, which in itself may prove to be good and perfect.

Is it not also the obvious *duty* of elders and other concerned Friends, to watch in like manner over *all* in this respect, both in the infancy of their gifts, or even apprehended gifts, and in the further progress of the true gift, as much as it is the interest and the duty of those who speak, to receive such hints as proofs of love, and to watch carefully over themselves, to preserve in utterance, as well as in more important respects, a clean and pure medium for conveying the heavenly mission.

Use may have reconciled some amongst us, to what may be termed a "preaching tone;" by which is not meant an easy and proper adaptation of the voice to the serious, solemn,

and peculiar duty of preaching, but an unnatural manner or modulation of voice, arising from habit—from some mistaken view of the subject—or from a want of calm, submissive resignation to the Divine requisition.

Can any on solid deliberation so far mistake the matter, as to imagine that *any affected* tone or modulation can give additional weight to a Divine commission? Compare the simple, easy utterance of those, whose voice in meetings may at once be recognized; and which, free from tone, receives no other stamp of modulation than what the nature of the subject, and the *simplicity* of solemn feeling, may impress;—compare such an utterance (and such may be heard amongst us) with a voice which, from some acquired peculiarity, is scarcely known till recognized as the habit of the individual: and, to an unprejudiced mind, which utterance is likely to convey gospel truths with the most effect? Which then is the most *pure channel* for the “perfect gift?”

We must be sensible that variations of voice may, in some instances, be neither affected nor acquired; but may be the spon-

taneous effect of conflicting feelings, under which the speaker is induced, from a sense of duty, to give vent to utterance. Here we are carried back to the first view of the subject. Conflicting feelings! Between what?—grace and nature! Divine grace operating on the mind, and suggesting the required sacrifice;—and nature, not yet fully subjugated, though evincing a willingness to set free that which is bound. Much tender sympathy is due to diffident minds, under these conflicting feelings; yet let all be encouraged to remember, that these are not the *simple* effects of the Divine, the “*perfect gift*.” They are obviously the effects of nature not yet fully resigned to grace, or of grace restraining the activity of nature. And may it not become a question whether any movement is for the best till this conflict subsides? At least it may be obvious, that true and full resignation is the most likely means of preserving the “*perfect gift*,” in a state of *purity* even in the *manner of utterance*.

Let no sincere traveller Zion-ward be discouraged at the portrait here sketched, of the dangers arising from this gift not being preserved pure. The greater the difficulty,

the greater the joy of the upright; and the peace of those who become simply obedient, will be more than commensurate to all the probations they may or can have to endure. Remember the injunction of our Lord: "What I say unto you I say unto all—watch." Consider how many have made for themselves a long wilderness travel, which He had never designed for them, for want of becoming, in His time, as the passive clay in his holy hand. Let it become, therefore, the earnest desire and aim of each, on every presentation of duty, to attain to that quiet settlement, in which there is neither desire to speak, nor wish to be silent, but as the Lord wills:—in which this language can be emphatically adopted: **THEY WILL BE DONE.**

As this state is attained, there will not only be command obtained over the natural powers of utterance; but as this state of *simplicity* is carefully maintained in the progress of speaking, with due watchfulness to keep close to the heavenly guide, and ever to close with the *flowings* of life, and not in what may be compared to the ebbing of the tide; every offering will no doubt bear the evident inscription of "*Holiness to the Lord.*"

The scope of these observations, besides their immediate application, points at an additional and highly important duty, which devolves upon us *all*, though in a more active sense, particularly on those in the station of Elders ;—that is, deeply to feel for and with those, who may not yet have made full proof of their ministry.

“There are *diversities* of gifts, but the same Spirit.” Hence, if we do not feel deeply after true *discernment* from the *same* Spirit, we may mistake the “*differences of administration*” in ourselves or others, on the very ground that all proceed from “the same Lord.” Let us all, therefore, willingly be baptized into a true sense of these “diversities of operations.” This may qualify, in cases in which there is danger of mistake, to give, by tender counsel, a right direction even to the true and “perfect gifts” of the Holy Spirit.

Without great care in this very important trust, individuals who may have a precious gift, may be encouraged to exercise that gift in the line of ministry, which in the designs of unerring wisdom ought to be

something else. Thus the "perfect gift" not being exercised in the right line of Divine appointment, is not unmixed and *pure*; and therefore will never shine forth with *unclouded* lustre, or evince, with that clearness which it might do, that it is "the same God who worketh all in all."

Your affectionate friend and brother,

WM. ALEXANDER.

YORK, 9th Month, 1826.





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